



Subject:	Food Service Delivery Plan 2023-2024
Date:	13 June 2023
Reporting Officer:	Siobhan Toland, Director of City Services
Contact Officer:	David Cuthbert, City Protection Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The Food Standards Agency, in their monitoring and oversight role, require all NI District Councils to prepare an annual Food Service Delivery Plan which sets out the Council's key functions and planned activities for delivery of food hygiene, food standards and other food safety related responsibilities.

1.2	This report presents Belfast City Council’s draft Food Service Delivery Plan for the 2023/24 year and seeks Committee approval of the draft plan so that it can be submitted to the Food Standards Agency for review.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is requested to approve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The draft Belfast City Council Food Service Delivery Plan 2023-2024
3.0	Main Report
	<p>Background</p> <p>3.1 The Council’s Food Safety Unit works with local businesses to build compliance with Food Law and to ensure that food produced and sold in Belfast is safe and can be trusted. This not only protects the consumer it also protects and enhances the reputation of the City, our local businesses and their competitiveness.</p> <p>3.2 Food related illness costs the local economy, individual businesses and the consumer- people may suffer from food poisoning and food related illness, potentially resulting in hospital admissions for some patients, and costing the Belfast economy through work related absences and consumer claims.</p> <p>3.3 A reputation for good food hygiene standards can support economic growth. The Food Hygiene Rating Act (NI) 2016 requires businesses to display their food hygiene rating, improving the opportunities for consumers to make informed choices and encouraging improved compliance. It is expected that this enhances the reputation of Belfast as a safe place to visit with at least 89% of food businesses rated as 3, 4 or 5 (broadly compliant or better). (See Appendix 2 for ratings breakdown).</p> <p>3.4 It is estimated that around 2 million people living in the UK have a food allergy and officers work to ensure food businesses provide the required (allergen) information to enable consumers to make informed choices. However recent cases of severe allergic reactions, including the tragic death of Natasha Ednan-Laperouse after eating a Pret a Manger sandwich, have highlighted concerns regarding the adequacy of labelling requirements for food that is prepacked for direct sale (PPDS) i.e., food that has been packed on the same premises from which it is being sold. New labelling legislation that came into force on 1st October 2021 requires any business that produces PPDS food to label it with the name of</p>

	<p>the food and a full ingredients list with allergenic ingredients emphasised within the list. These additional legal requirements will require officer time to support, monitor and ensure compliance. It is likely this work will impact significantly on the unit.</p>
3.5	<p>The UK's exit from the European Union continues to pose challenges for the Council's imported food control function this year. Recent uncertainty arising from extended UK/EU discussions on the NI Protocol, and the anticipated introduction of the new Windsor Framework arrangements later in 2023, means that final arrangements are yet to be fully embedded. Work to finalise processes, infrastructure and a longer-term sustainable resourcing model for these services continues to require input from the Port Health service in the 2023/24 year. We are working closely with the Food Standards Agency, DAERA, DEFRA, other government departments, local businesses and other stakeholders to ensure adequate arrangements are in place to facilitate trade and protect consumers.</p>
3.6	<p>Each year, the Council produces a Food Service Delivery Plan which sets out the activities, techniques and approaches to be taken during the year to support businesses in ensuring food safety, food standards and to promote informed healthy choices. The Plan provides the basis on which the Council's regulatory activities are monitored and audited by the Food Standards Agency and it is a requirement that it is presented to the Council for approval.</p>
3.7	<p>The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has a key role in overseeing local authority regulatory activities to ensure that official controls are delivered. Powers to enable the FSA to monitor and audit local authorities are contained in the Food Standards Act 1999. A detailed Framework Agreement on local food law enforcement has been produced by the Agency, in conjunction with local authority representative bodies, to provide guidance on how regulatory service plans should be structured and what they should contain. Service plans developed under these arrangements provide the basis on which local authorities are monitored and audited by the Food Standards Agency.</p>
3.8	<p>Key Issues</p> <p>The Framework Agreement as described above requires that Food Service Delivery Plans should be submitted to the relevant Member forum, in this case the People and Communities Committee, for approval. This is to ensure local transparency and accountability.</p>

3.9	<p>A summary of the key work activities completed in the last year and profiling the work of the unit is included for information in Appendix 1. A summary of current food hygiene ratings is included in Appendix 2. The Food Service Delivery Plan for 2023/2024 is included in Appendix 3.</p>
3.10	<p>Members should note that during the Covid pandemic, food hygiene and food standards inspection programmes were significantly impacted, as visits were paused due to business closures during periods of lock down, and subsequent restrictions on social distancing etc. The FSA worked with Local Authorities across England, Wales and Northern Ireland during 2022/23 to develop recovery plans for food safety services, setting priorities for service recovery during the 2022/23 year. Belfast City Council's Food Safety team successfully achieved the key milestones and objectives for 2022/23 which were designed to focus interventions on the highest risk businesses, bringing these back into the routine inspection programme. As a result, significant progress has been made towards returning to normal inspection frequencies for the vast majority of businesses across the range of high, moderate and low risk categories.</p>
3.11	<p>FSA recently advised that the recovery plan approach would cease on 31st March 2023. This change renews the expectation for Local Authorities to return businesses to their normal inspection frequencies, as laid out in the Food Law Code of Practice. The FSA have however acknowledged that a backlog of inspections still remains among many Local Authorities and have advised that a pragmatic and risk-based approach should continue to be adopted where this is needed. Belfast City Council's Food Service Delivery Plan for 2023/24 reflects this updated approach and the inspection programme prepared by the Council's Food Safety team will return most businesses to normal inspection frequencies. For some businesses in the very lowest risk category the service will also utilise alternative enforcement strategies to ensure these businesses continue to address food safety issues, while ensuring business risk profiles are up to date.</p>
3.12	<p>FSA will be continuing its work in 2023/24 to modernise the delivery models for Food Standards and Food Hygiene regulatory inspection programmes, to ensure inspections and resources are better targeted based on risk, while reducing burdens for businesses and Competent Authorities where possible. Belfast City Council responded to a consultation on the proposed changes to the Food Standards model in January 2023. FSA have indicated</p>

	<p>that Councils will be further consulted on proposed changes to the Food Hygiene delivery model in 2023/24.</p> <p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>3.13 The resources required for this core service have been included in the City and Neighbourhood Services Revenue Estimates for the year and no additional resources are anticipated.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessments</u></p> <p>3.14 None</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 - Summary of the key areas of work undertaken by the Food Safety and Port Health Unit 2022-2023</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Current food hygiene ratings</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Food Service Delivery Plan 2023-2024</p>